

quit Maine and re-establish his colony of fanatics on the O'Hara land, in the very center and heart of the wealthiest and most rigidly exclusive country club in America:

That night the frightened Major telegraphed to Munnville, Maine, an offer to buy the O'Hara place at double its real value. The business-like message ended. "Wire reply at my expense."

The next morning an incoherent reply came by wire, at the Major's expense, refusing to sell, and quoting several passages of Scripture at Western Union rates per word.

The operator at the station counted the words carefully, and collected eight dollars and fourteen cents from the Major, whose fury deprived him of speech.

Colonel Hyssop awaited his comrade at the club-house, nervously pacing the long veranda, gnawing his cigar. "Hello!" he called out, as Major Brent waddled up. "Have you bought the O'Hara place for us?"

The Major made no attempt to reply; he panted violently at the Colonel, then began to run about, taking little, short, distracted steps.

"Made a mess of it?" inquired the Colonel, with a badly concealed sneer.

He eyed the Major in deepening displeasure. "If you get any redder in the face you'll blow up," he said, coldly; "and I don't propose to have you spatter me."

"He—he's an impudent swindler!" hissed the Major, convulsively.

The Colonel sniffed: "I expected it. What of it? After all, there's nobody on the farm to annoy us, is there?"

"Wait!" groaned the Major—"wait!" and he toddled into the hall and fell on a chair, beating space with his pudgy hands.

When the Colonel at length learned the nature of the threatened calamity, he utterly refused to credit it.

"Rubbish!" he said calmly—"rubbish! my dear fellow; this man Munn is holding out for more money, d'ye see? Rubbish! rubbish! It's blackmail, d'ye see?"

"Do you think so?" faltered the Major, hopefully.

"It isn't possible that they mean to come, is it? Fancy all those fanatics shouting about under our windows—"

"Rubbish!" said the Colonel, calmly. "I'll write to the fellow myself."

All through that rainy month of May the two old cronies had the club-house to themselves; they slopped about together, fishing cheek by jowl as they had fished for thirty years; at night they sat late over their toddy, and disputed and bickered and wagged their fingers at each other, and went to bed with the perfect gravity of gentlemen who could hold their own with any toddy ever brewed.

No reply came to the Colonel, but that did not discourage him.

"They are playing a waiting game," he said, sagely. "This man Munn has bought the land from O'Hara's daughter for a song, and he means to bleed us. I'll write to Sprowl; he'll fix things."

Early in June Dr. Lansing and his young kinsman, De Witt Coursay, arrived at the club-house. They, also, were of the opinion that Munn's object was to squeeze the club by threats.

The second week in June, Peyster Sprowl, Master of Fox-hounds, Shadocbrook, appeared with his wife, the celebrated beauty, Agatha Sprowl, nee Van Guilder.

Sprowl, now immensely large and fat, had few cares in life beyond an anxious apprehension concerning the durability of his own digestion. However, he was still able to make a midnight mouthful of a Welsh rarebit on a hot mince-pie, and wash it down with a quart of champagne, and so the world went very well with him, even if it wobbled a trifle for his handsome wife.

"She's lovely enough," said Colonel Hyssop, gallantly, "to set every star in heaven wabbling." To which the bull-necked Major assented with an ever-hopeless attempt to bend at the waist-band.

Meanwhile the Rev. Amasa Munn and his flock, the Shining Band, arrived at Foxville in six farm wagons, singing "Roll, Jordan!"

Of their arrival Sprowl was totally unconscious, the Colonel having forgotten to inform him of the threatened invasion.

II

The members of the Sagamore Club heard the news next morning at a late breakfast. Major Brent, who had been fishing early up-stream, bore the news, and delivered it in an incoherent bellow.

"What d'ye mean by that?" demanded Colonel Hyssop, setting down his cocktail with unsteady fingers.

"Mean?" roared the Major; "I mean that Munn and a lot o' women are sitting on the river-bank and singing 'Home Again!'"

The news jarred everybody, but the effect of it upon the president, Peyster Sprowl, appeared to be out of all proportion to its gravity. That gentleman's face was white as death; and the Major noticed it.

"You'll have to rid us of this mob," said the Major, slowly.

Sprowl lifted his heavy, overfed face from his plate. "I'll attend to it," he said, hoarsely, and swallowed a pint of claret.

"I think it is amusing," said Agatha Sprowl, looking across the table at Coursay.

"Amusing, madam!" burst out the Major. "They'll be doing their laundry in our river next!"

"Soapsuds in my favorite pools!" bawled the Colonel. "Damme if I'll permit it!"

"Sprowl ought to settle them," said Lansing, good-naturedly. "It may cost us a few thousands, but Sprowl will do the work this time as he did it before."

Sprowl choked in his claret, turned a vivid beef-color, and wiped his chin. His appetite was ruined. He hoped the ruin would stop there.

"What harm will they do?" asked Coursay, seriously—"beyond the soapsuds?"

"They'll fish, they'll throw tin cans in the water, they'll keep us awake with their fanatical powwows—confound it, haven't I seen that sort of thing?" said the Major, passionately. "Yes, I have, at nigger camp meetings! And these people beat the niggers at that sort of thing!"

"Leave 'em to me," repeated Peyster Sprowl, thickly, and began on another chop from force of habit.

"About fifteen years ago," said the Colonel, "there was some talk about our title. You fixed that, didn't you, Sprowl?"

"Yes," said Sprowl, with parched lips. "Of course," muttered the major; "it cost us a cool hundred thousand to perfect our title. Thank God it's settled."

Sprowl's immense body turned perfectly cold; he buried his face in his glass and drained it. Then the shrimp-color returned to his neck and ears, and deepened to scarlet. When the earth ceased reeling before his apoplectic eyes, he looked around, furtively. Again the scene in O'Hara's death-chamber came to him; the threat of Munn, who had got wind of the true situation, and the bribing of Munn to silence.

But the club had given Sprowl one hundred thousand dollars to perfect its title; and Sprowl had reported the title perfect, all proceedings ended, and the payment of one hundred thousand dollars to Amasa Munn, as guardian of the child of O'Hara, in full payment for the O'Hara claims to the club property.

Sprowl's coolness began to return. If five thousand dollars had stopped Munn's mouth once, it might stop it again. Besides, how could Munn know that Sprowl had kept for his own uses ninety-five thousand dollars of his club's money, and had founded upon it the house of Sprowl of many millions? He was quite cool now—a trifle anxious to know what Munn meant to ask for, but confident that his millions were a buckler and a shield to the honored name of Sprowl.

"I'll see this fellow, Munn, after breakfast," he said, lighting an expensive cigar.

"I'll go with you," volunteered Lansing, casually, strolling out towards the veranda.

"No, no!" called out Sprowl; "you'll

only hamper me." But Landings did not hear him outside in the sunshine.

Agatha Sprowl laid one fair, heavily ringed hand on the table and pushed her chair back. The Major gallantly waddled to withdraw her chair; she rose with a gesture of thanks, and a glance which shot the Major through and through—a wound he never could accustom himself to receive with stoicism.

Mrs. Sprowl turned carelessly away, followed by her two Great Danes—a superb trio, woman and dogs beautifully built and groomed, and expensive enough to please even such an amateur as Peyster Sprowl, M. F. H.

"Gad, Sprowl!" sputtered the Major "your wife grows handsomer every minute—and you grow fatter!"

Sprowl, midway in a glass of claret, said: "This simple backwoods regime is what she and I need."

Agatha Sprowl was certainly handsome, but the Major's eyesight was none the best. She had not been growing younger; there were lines; also a discreet employment of tints on a very silky skin, which was not quite as fresh as it had once been.

Dr. Lansing, strolling on the veranda with his pipe, met her and her big dogs turning the corner in full sunlight. Coursay was with her, his eager, flushed face close to hers; but he fell back when he saw his kinsman Lansing, and presently retired to the lawn to unreel and dry out a couple of wet silk lines.

Agatha Sprowl sat down on the veranda railing, exchanging a gay smile across the lawn with Coursay; then her dark eyes met Lansing's steel-gray ones. "Good morning, once more," she said, mockingly.

He returned her greeting, and began to change his mist leader for a white one.

"Will you kindly let Jack Coursay alone?" she said, in a low voice.

"No," he replied, in the same tone.

"Are you serious?" she asked, as though the idea amused her.

"Of course," he replied, pleasantly.

"Is it true that you came here because he came?" she inquired, with faint sarcasm in her eyes.

"Yes," he answered, with perfect good-nature. "You see he's my own kin; you see I'm the old-fashioned sort—a perfect fool, Mrs. Sprowl."

There was a silence; he unbound the glistening leader; she flicked at shadows with her dog-whip; the Great Danes yawned and laid their heavy heads against her knees.

"Then you are a fool!" she concluded, serenely.

He was young enough to redden.

Three years ago she had thought it time to marry somebody, if she ever intended to marry at all; so she threw over half a dozen young fellows like Coursay, and married Sprowl. For two years her beauty, audacity, and imprudence kept a metropolis and two capitals in food for scandal. And now for a year gossip was coupling her name with Coursay's.

"I warned you at Palm Beach that I'd stop this," said Lansing, looking directly into her eyes. "You see, I know his mother."

"Stop what?" she asked, coolly.

He went on: "Jack is a curiously decent boy; he views his danger without panic, but with considerable surprise. But nobody can tell what he may do. As for me, I'm indifferent, liberal, and reasonable in any views of . . . other people's conduct. But Jack is not one of those 'other people,' you see."

"And I am?" she suggested, serenely.

"Exactly; I'm not your keeper."

"So you confine your attention to Jack and the Decalogue?"

"As for the Commandments," observed Lansing, "any ass can shatter them with his hind heels, so why should he? If he must be an ass, let him be an original ass—not a cur."

"A cur," repeated Agatha Sprowl, unsteadily.

"An *affaire de coeur* with a married woman is an affair of cur," said Lansing, calmly—"Gallieize it as you wish, make it smart and fashionable as you can. I told you I was old-fashioned . . . And I mean it, madam."

The leader had eluded him; he uncoiled it again; she mechanically took

it between her delicate fingers and held it steady while he measured and shortened it by six inches.

"Do you think," she said, between her teeth, "that it is your mission to padlock me to that—in there?"

Lansing turned, following her eyes. She was looking at her husband.

"No," replied Lansing, serenely; "but I shall see that you don't transfer the padlock to . . . that, out there"—glancing at Coursay on the lawn.

"Try it," she breathed, and let go of the leader, which flew up in silvery crinkles, the cast of brightly colored flies dancing in the sunshine.

"Oh, let him alone," said Lansing, wearily; all the men in Manhattan are drivelling about you. Let him go; he's a sorry trophy—and there's no natural treachery in him; . . . it's not in our blood; . . . it's too cheap for us, and we can't help saying so when we're in our right minds."

There was a little color left in her face when she stood up, her hands resting on the spiked collars of her dogs.

"The trouble with you," she said, smiling adorably, "is your innate delicacy."

"I know I am brutal," he said, grimly; "let him alone."

She gave him a pretty salutation, crossed the lawn, passed her husband, who had just ridden up on a powerful sorrel, and called brightly to Coursay: "Take me fishing, Jack, or I'll yawn my head off my shoulders."

Before Lansing could recover his wits the audacious beauty had stepped into the canoe at the edge of the lawn, and young Coursay, eager and radiant, gave a flourish to his paddle, and drove it into the glittering water.

If Sprowl found anything disturbing to his peace of mind in the proceeding, he did not betray it. He sat hunched upon his big sorrel, eyes fixed on the distant clearing, where the white gable-end of O'Hara's house rose among the trees.

Suddenly he wheeled his mount and galloped off up the river road; the sun glowed on his broad back, and struck fire on his spurs, then horse and rider were gone into the green shadows of the woods.

To play spy was not included in Lansing's duties as he understood them. He gave one disgusted glance after the canoe, shrugged, set fire to the tobacco in his pipe, and started slowly along the river towards O'Hara's with a vague idea of lending counsel, aid and countenance to his president during the expected interview with Munn.

At the turn of the road he met Major Brent and old Peter, the head-keeper. The latter stood polishing the barrels of his shot-gun with a red bandanna; the Major was fuming and wagging his head.

"Doctor!" he called out, when Lansing appeared; "Peter says they raised the devil down at O'Hara's last night! This can't go on, d'ye see! No, by Heaven!"

"What were they doing, Peter?" asked Lansing, coming up to where the old man stood.

"Them Shinin' Banders? Waal, sir, they was kinder rigged out in white night-gowns—robes o' Jordan they call 'em—an' they had rubbed some kind o' shiny stuff—like matches—all over these there night-gowns, an' then they sang a spell, an' then they all sot down on the edge o' the river."

"Is that all?" asked Lansing, laughing.

"Wait!" growled the Major.

"Waal," continued old Peter, "the shinin' stuff on them night-gowns was that bright that I seen the fishes swimmin' round kinder dazed like. 'Gosh!' sez I to m'self, it's like a Jack-a-drawnin' them trout—yass'r. So I hollers out, 'Here! You Shinin' Band folk, you air a-drawin' the trout, 'Here! sez I, ha'sh an' pert-like. Then that there Munn, the Prophet, he up an' hollers, 'Hark how the heathen rage!' he hollers. An' with that, blamed if he didn't sling a big net into the river, an' all them Shinin' Banders ketched holt an' they drewed it clean up-stream. 'Quit that!' I hollers, 'it's agin the game laws!' But the Prophet he hollers back, 'Hark how the

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